

Can a few dollars nudge the AIDS mountain in East Africa?

[The following is a news release from Lutheran World Relief]

Baltimore, March 25, 2004 – Can a few well-placed dollars in East Africa protect lives by the thousand and invite funds by the million to fight AIDS? Keep reading and see.

Around the world major players in public health are gearing up to find ways to treat three million HIV-positive people with anti-retroviral drugs by the year 2005.

In Tanzania, some two million people have contracted HIV/AIDS so far. HIV/AIDS patients occupy more than half the hospital beds in the East African country. The Lutheran church, a major denomination there, has 20 hospitals and 150 clinics that provide 15 percent of health services in the nation.

Early this year, with funds for AIDS drugs set to increase dramatically, medical staff of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania were eager to provide drug therapy to as many patients as possible. But a final hurdle remained. Anti-retroviral training was not available and had never been offered in Tanzania.

Enter Lutheran World Relief, an organization that specializes in “capacity building” – development jargon for moving mountains and other obstacles with promising partner organizations.

LWR linked ELCT with HIV/AIDS training experts from South Africa, the Foundation for Professional Development. Then LWR, using funds raised by the inter-Lutheran Stand With Africa campaign, agreed to sponsor the 60 Tanzanian clinicians who needed to learn clinical management of HIV/AIDS drug therapy.

“We just finished the training...and it was excellent,” Dr. Mark Jacobson, a Lutheran missionary doctor in Arusha, wrote LWR President Kathryn Wolford after the sessions last month. “It was the very first anti-retroviral training program ever offered in Tanzania! It is on the news!”

“Most importantly, it sensitized the [clinicians] to the issues around implementing a wide-scale anti-retroviral program in a country like Tanzania,” Jacobson said. “[Thanks to] LWR for making the connections and then making this possible. It has truly had a great impact.”

The \$16,200 grant from LWR helped certify health workers, but did it protect thousands of lives and invite millions of dollars? When 60 clinicians treat 17 patients each there will be 1,020 people with a new lease on life and, when Interchurch Medical Assistance, an LWR partner in the U.S., was chosen recently as part of a consortium to deliver millions of dollars of AIDS drugs, the Lutheran church hospitals of Tanzania were ready for action.

Source: *Lutheran World Relief Web site:* www.lwr.org